

Executive Summary

The Department's strategic plan, The Compass, includes broad goals and objectives for the management of wildlife in Idaho. The White-tailed Deer Plan is a more specific document that provides Commission direction to the Department on how to carry out those goals and objectives for white-tailed deer management. This plan is scheduled for revision in 2015, but will remain in effect until modified.

The Commission requested revision of the existing 1998 white-tailed deer plan in April, 2003. The task of plan revision was assigned to a planning team comprised of wildlife biologists from each region of the state, to identify broad-scale issues and provide perspectives from all parts of the state. An opinion survey was then conducted of northern Idaho hunters, of southern Idaho hunters, and of landowners statewide to gauge satisfaction with the existing program, and to identify issues. Team members investigated white-tailed deer management programs in other states across the country, reviewed white-tailed deer literature, and summarized Idaho data, providing further basis for development of this plan.

Sounding boards, made up of invited white-tailed deer hunters, were used in each region to discuss management issues and alternatives prior to drafting the plan during late summer 2004. Prior to Commission action, the plan was made available on the Department web site from mid-October to mid-November 2004, and presented to the public at open meetings in each region during October and early November. A brief follow-up survey was made of hunters and landowners during October and November 2004 to further gauge public acceptance of management actions proposed in the plan.

The early opinion surveys indicated hunters had high satisfaction levels for the number of days of hunting opportunity offered, the chance to harvest a white-tailed deer, and the opportunity to harvest a mature white-tailed deer buck. Use of the Clearwater Deer Tag to address trespass issues in the Clearwater Region had good acceptance.

A substantial amount of background on white-tailed deer is given in the plan. The major issues identified and addressed include habitat management, white-tailed deer hunting opportunity, management data needs, agricultural and urban damage by deer, hunting access, availability of mature bucks, use of motorized vehicles during hunting, feeding deer, and diseases affecting deer.

Overall management direction is to provide minimums of 35,000 hunters with 207,000 days of recreation and the opportunity to harvest at least 8,700 white-tailed deer bucks, of which at least 15% have 5 points or more on the right antler. Stakeholder opinion surveys will be used to assess the public's support for the white-tailed deer management program. Strategies proposed to address various issues include:

- More focus on management of white-tailed deer habitat including habitat mapping and working with both private and public landowners to improve white-tailed deer habitat.
- Creation of a new White-tailed Deer Tag, good only for that species but in all general hunt units, including those after November 3.
- A new emphasis on using hunter and landowner satisfaction as measures of program success. A standard opinion survey will be conducted prior to 2010 and periodically



thereafter to assess satisfaction of hunters and landowners regarding the state's white-tailed deer management program.

- Improvements to data collection, including more specific white-tailed deer harvest data, and development of non-harvest methods to track whitetail populations.
- More flexibility in addressing deer over-population and damage problems.
- Continued efforts to gain hunting access to private land, and through private land to public land.
- Maintenance of mature bucks in the population, with a minimum of 15% of the buck harvest with 5 or more points on the right antler.
- A commitment to provide a diversity of motorized and non-motorized hunting opportunities for white-tailed deer.
- Discourage supplemental feeding of white-tailed deer, except in accordance with the Department's Emergency Winter Feeding policy.
- Additional monitoring of white-tailed deer for chronic wasting disease and other diseases and parasites.